

VZCZCXYZ0006
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHTV #2586/01 3261431
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 211431Z NOV 08
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9244
INFO RUEAEPA/HQ EPA WASHDC
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 5043
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 3075

UNCLAS TEL AVIV 002586

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/IAI, NEA/REA and OES/ENV
EPA FOR INTERNATIONAL - Fulton, Metcalfe
AMMAN for ESTH
PARIS for USOECD

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SENV](#) [EINV](#) [TBIO](#) [IS](#)

SUBJ: EPA Administrator Visits Israel

¶11. (U) Summary: US Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Stephen L. Johnson visited Israel October 22-27, consulting with GOI ministries of Environmental Protection and National Infrastructure, and visiting pollution hotspots and sites of reclamation. In discussions with GOI officials Johnson and his delegation advanced USG objectives of sharing technology that combats pollution, enhances water security, and facilitates Israeli compliance with criteria for OECD membership. Israeli officials expressed interest in greater technology exchange, more information about EPA's Environmental Technology Verification (ETV) program, and training to increase environmental enforcement capacity. Despite imminent elections and changes in both American and Israeli governments, contact and collaboration between career staff of both countries will continue to pursue a number of shared interests. EPA officers cleared on this report. End Summary.

¶12. (U) US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Stephen L. Johnson visited Israel October 22-27, on the invitation from Israel Minister for Environmental Protection Gideon Ezra. The Administrator was accompanied by Chief of Staff Charles Ingebretson, Acting Assistant Administrator for International Affairs Scott Fulton, New York Regional Administrator Alan J. Steinberg, and Tom Dunne, EPA Associate Administrator for Homeland Security. Conny Arvis, Deputy Director NEA/RA and post ESTH officer also joined the EPA trip. Johnson's first meeting was with the Ambassador to discuss EPA's interests in Israel and receive a briefing on the broader bilateral relationship. Since 9/11, the EPA has been responsible for US water security policy, protecting the national water supplies from intentional or accidental contamination by chemical, biological, radiological or other agents. Understanding how Israel manages these risks and structures its response to such incidents was the primary objective of Johnson's trip. EPA was also interested in enhancing the exchange of environmental technology, building on a 1992 bilateral MOU between EPA and Israel's Ministry of Environment. Finally, Johnson wanted to explore the regional dimension of pollution in the Middle East, specifically asking to meet with Palestinian environmental authorities. Ambassador outlined the state of Annapolis negotiations and USG engagement with Israel on key regional issues.

Ministry Meetings

¶13. (U) On October 23, Johnson and delegation, accompanied by the Ambassador, met Minister Ezra and Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) officials in Tel Aviv. Ezra opened discussions by pointing out the great potential for cooperation between the two countries, and how much Israel could learn from the far broader US experience with environmental regulation. Stating that Israel's force of 45 enforcement officials was far below the number required, he noted the need for better training and increasing his ministry's capacity. Effective enforcement enables better understanding of the source of environmental problems, he said. MEP Deputy Director

General Valerie Brachya briefly outlined the state of Israel's environment. The country faces shortages of water, natural resources and living space, while it must cope with rising air pollution, population, demand for energy, and risk to biodiversity. MEP objectives, she synopsized, are to decrease emissions, reduce Israel's vulnerability to environmental risk, and improve the sustainability of the economy. To achieve these objectives, Brachya stressed the need for better environmental technologies, and hoped that US technology could be tapped to help.

¶4. (U) One motivation for upgrading Israel's environmental technology, Brachya stated, is Israel's pending membership application to the OECD. Environmental criteria make up 60 of the 200 instruments required by the OECD for accession, she observed, and meeting the costs of accommodation was becoming a challenge given Israel's budget constraints. Israel's approach to the environment is primarily a command-and-control approach, but they are working to develop the needed economic instruments. To this end, Israel was looking to the US for assistance on how to implement these instruments. Israel will give its first presentation at the upcoming OECD Environmental Policy Committee meeting in February, 2009. Administrator Johnson said he understood Israel's situation, and hoped the bilateral agreement signed in 1992 could be useful for future collaboration. He underscored that the coming change of US administrations made him unable to commit any future EPA resources, but he expected that the career staff of EPA, including Acting Assistant Administrator for International Affairs Scott Fulton, would continue to work to facilitate technology exchange.

¶5. (U) MEP Vice Director General Yossi Inbar outlined GOI incentive structures devised to encourage the development and adoption of environmental technology by business. These mechanisms include Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (PRTR) and special funds to assist companies changing over to better technologies. Inbar stressed that information about EPA's Environmental Technology Verification (ETV) program would greatly assist Israeli environmental technology developers, and he hoped a way could be found to provide this information to Israeli researchers.

¶6. (U) Yossi Inbar and Michal BarTov briefly presented how Israel manages hazardous substances. This included handling of incidents, risk management, integrated emergency reaction methods, and decontamination responses. MEP coordinates all government bodies dealing with hazardous materials. A distinction between the immediate reaction and the longer-term response and recovery period was made. Israel records an average of 250 hazmat incidents per year, mostly in-plant accidents, spills or transportation events. Due to its compact size, Israeli reaction capacity can be pulled from locales across the country quickly and is very diverse, encompassing fire, police, environment ministry, Home Front Command, and Red Cross (Red Magen David) components. Biological contamination is not MEP's responsibility. MEP is the first responder for "dirty bombs", but is not responsible for long-term recovery.

¶7. (U) EPA discussed emergency response with MEP, where the issue is both radiological decontamination and area-wide biological contamination. Both sides agreed to arrange a follow-up discussion between the experts to share common concerns and responses to long-term decontamination.

¶8. (U) Valerie Brachya discussed the Israeli situation with respect to air pollution. Air pollution "hot spots" include the Haifa Bay industrial area, the Hadera Power Plant, Tel Aviv, which is Israel's most densely populated urban area, the Ashkelon industrial area, and the Ramat Hovav industrial area. Israel has one of the most dense air monitoring networks in the world, with about 100 air monitoring stations throughout the country, run by MEP and local officials. These stations measure PM 2.5, PM 10, NOX, SOX and lead. Gasoline has been unleaded since 2004, and they are working to reduce sulfur in fuel, thus reducing particulates from transportation. MEP is very interested in cooperation with EPA regarding air quality, including risk assessment guidelines, quality assurance/quality control of air monitoring stations, air dispersion modeling for complex terrain, and remote sensing technology for monitoring emissions.

¶9. (U) The EPA Administrator, again accompanied by Ambassador, met

with the Ministry of National Infrastructure (MNI), led by Director General Hezi Kugler. Also attending were representatives from MEP, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Agriculture. The agenda covered three topics: water security, emergency response capacity, and alternative energy as a means of reducing environmental risks. Each side shared lessons from experience; Tom Dunne, previously head of the Federal Disaster Assistance Administration, the predecessor to FEMA, presented the EPA's Water Security Initiative. The differences in scale between the US and Israel were striking: Israel has a single parastatal (Mekorot) that distributes water through the national carrier system, and is responsible for sourcing and securing three-fourths of Israel's water; Dunne noted that the US has over 15,000 water treatment systems and 54,000 distribution systems. Nonetheless, the same imperatives of physical security, public health protection, and consumer awareness operate in both countries. The critical features of monitoring, precautionary actions, command and control in reaction situations, and decontamination during a remediation phase were common to both systems. Uri Shani, Director of the Israel Water Authority, discussed the country's critical water shortage, and the importance of desalination. By 2014, if present tenders issued by the Israeli government for additional desalination facilities are built, Israel will produce 750 million cubic meters of water, almost the entirety of consumer fresh water demand in Israel. Agriculture by then will be shifted to 100 percent treated wastewater use, from about 43 percent now. In Israel, the Ministry of Health is in charge of drinking water quality. Israel does not allow wastewater to be used for drinking water, even treated wastewater.

¶10. (U) Kugler outlined the GOI's alternative energy policy objectives. Transportation is the major cause of pollution in Israel, followed by electricity generation. While the Environment Ministry has mandated low-sulfur diesel and no-lead gasoline, MNI policy addresses the energy sector. Twenty years ago Israel switched from fuel oil to coal for its power generation, and now is turning to natural gas as a cleaner alternative. Coal presently generates 70 percent of Israel's electricity, and is expected to still power 50 percent of it in 2050. Israel thus needs clean coal technology, both to reduce CO₂ emissions and to diminish the country's vulnerability to petroleum suppliers and prices. One

concern, however, is that there is not enough area available for carbon sequestration in Israel. Alternative energy sources are also being pursued, including construction of a 250 mw solar power plant in the Negev desert, and wind and wave energy projects. The Ministry's goal is to produce 10-15 percent of electricity from alternative sources by 2020; this is paired with the ambitious goal of reducing Israel's energy consumption by 20 percent by 2020 (off of a 2006 baseline). Regarding transportation, the goal is 5 percent of all fuel needs from biofuels by 2012. Johnson echoed Kugler's hope to see clean coal technology advance, as the US still derives half its power from coal, and has a 200 year supply. Bilateral cooperation on energy is strong, Johnson acknowledged, with the US DOE playing the coordinating role on joint research.

¶11. (U) Johnson met US Consul General Walles in Jerusalem on October 24, and separately with the Vice chairman of the Palestinian Water Authority and consultants to discuss environmental and water problems in the regional perspective. These meetings will be covered septel.

Hot Spots and Water Sites

¶12. (U) Administrator Johnson and his delegation traveled to Haifa Bay and its surrounding port to observe Israel's environmental challenge. Environment Ministry officials briefed Johnson while surveying the site from land and from the water. The City of Haifa has 400,000 residents, 13 percent of Israel's population, with a density of 2600 persons per square mile crowded into a mountainous coastal landscape. Haifa is Israel's chief deep water port, and the coastal plain bordering it on the East is one of Israel's most highly industrialized zones. Besides the freight port, there are oil refineries, petrochemical plants, natural gas storage, heavy industry and a power generation plant. The Kishon River bisects the area as it empties into Haifa Bay, and is one of the most polluted sites in Israel.

¶13. (U) The close proximity of hazardous and toxic industrial sites

to dense a population center raises serious environmental and public health risks. (During the 1991 Gulf War a missile attack on Haifa targeted the tank farm storing ammonia, and could have had disastrous consequences.) The Ministry policy is to promote reuse, recycling, neutralization and safe disposal of hazardous materials. Johnson and EPA officers compared the Haifa Bay situation to Long Beach, California, and Newark, New Jersey, and discussed US efforts to address comparable problems.

¶14. (U) A visit to the Eshkol filtration facility of Mekorot, Israel's national water distributor, focused on water quality and security. The Eshkol facility, opened in 2007 after a US\$200 million investment, is Israel's central filtration plant and the fourth largest in the world. Its capacity is 450 million cubic meters of water annually, with most of the water drawn from Lake Tiberias and distributed through the national carrier. It uses less chemical treatment than other facilities, and is more environmentally friendly. As part of its quality monitoring system, Mekorot uses a fish species from Africa that is highly sensitive to toxins as an indicator of deterioration in water quality.

¶15. (U) The Administrator also received briefings at the source of Israel's national water carrier system, the Sapir Intake at Lake Tiberias. At Sapir, massive pumps push the water from 213 meters below sea level(Lake Tiberias) to 44 meters above sea level where it flows to the Eshkol filtration plant. Given the Sapir location - the northern edge of the lake, within sight of formerly Syrian-controlled Golan Heights - the plant was placed inside a mountain, underground for better defense of the critical resource facility. Mekorot management briefed EPA on the mechanics of the facility, as well as water security features of Israel's distribution system further downstream. Water from the Sapir facility is transported ultimately down to the Negev Desert, after consumer use and treatment in central Israel. Hydrologists pointed out that due to poor rains the Lake's level has fallen five meters over the decade, and now stands only 20cm above the black line level, below which it will be physically difficult to withdraw water. The red-line level, below which it is hydrologically unwise and ecologically damaging to withdraw water, was crossed last August.

¶16. (U) Desalination is Israel's hope for a future sustainable water supply. The EPA team toured the Ashkelon desalinization plant, the largest in the world, on October 26. The facility is a BOT (spell out) operation drawing on investment from Veolia and an Israeli partner IDE, and produced 105 million cm of pure water in 2007. It uses a reverse osmosis membrane technology, pumping sea water at 70 bars of pressure through filters. Two other facilities of this scale are slated to be opened in 2009 (Hadera) and 2013 (Palmachim), Israel's goal is 750 mcm of desalinated water in 2013, the entirety of consumer water demand. The security that desalination provides to Israel's water system comes at the price of energy; the Ashkelon plant has its own 55 MW gas-fired power plant, and nation-wide 6 percent of all electricity produced goes to supplying water around Israel, a figure that will increase with more desalination facilities. Ashkelon, however, is one of the most efficient desalination plants in the world, re-using much of its energy.

¶17. (U) Towards addressing both energy needs and environmental remediation, Israel's Dan Regional Association of Towns is turning an enormous former landfill on the edge of Tel Aviv into a natural gas source and nature/recreation park. The EPA team toured Hiriya/Park Ariel Sharon, observing 70 wells producing 30,000 cubic meters of natural gas captured each day from the 120 acre former landfill. Most of the 2000 hectare site will be graded, planted and groomed into a recreation center. One corner of Hiriya remains a processing and transfer point for urban waste, where it is sorted and organic materials are fed to an anaerobic digester facility for biogas production, while glass and plastics are sent to recycling. The goal is to reduce the waste sent to landfill by 50 percent in weight, because Tel Aviv's waste is now sent 60 - 80 miles south, at a cost of USD 30 per ton.

Public Roundtable

¶18. (U) On October 23 Administrator Johnson delivered the keynote speech at a Tel Aviv University forum on "The Business Case for Environmental Protection." He addressed the tension between

advancing environmental initiatives in the business world and maintaining an economic competitive advantage. His theme was that the two challenges are not mutually exclusive. Today, American businesses recognize the benefits in having a strategic environmental corporate program, and the cost effectiveness in avoiding pollution. The pressure to find new, ecologically-sensitive technologies can be a pro-active challenge and enhance competitiveness. This approach is also validated by the high cost of litigation and general public disapproval for poor environmental performance; corporate environmental records increasingly influence the public's purchasing and investment decisions. In sum, a culture of compliance needs to be fostered by public authorities. The lively roundtable discussion following Johnson's talk included representatives from the Israeli Ministry of Environment, the Israel Union of Environmental Defense, and the Alfred Akirov Institute for Business and the Environment at Tel Aviv University.

Next Steps

¶19. (U) Although the impending changes of government in both Israel and the United States made policy commitments with budget implications inappropriate, EPA Administrator and team departed with a list of specific interests for EPA career staff to pursue. GOI Environment Ministry would like to see the EPA share its approach to Environmental Technology Verification, along with other environmental programs. Closer exchange of information on environmental approaches and technologies that could lighten the burden of Israel complying with OECD membership criteria are a priority as well. GOI officials acknowledged that Israel's enforcement mechanisms are weak and need more training and better funding, especially in light of new regulatory obligations.

¶20. (U) From the American side, discussions continue about specific follow-up, but could include 3 issues:

-- Water Security: EPA will continue to follow up on the 2005 Statement of Intent on Water Security, and commit to working together with the Israelis to enhance each country's knowledge on water security. EPA will exchange information regarding water security, including prevention, detection, and monitoring; and facilitate visits to each nation's water infrastructure sites to observe physical security arrangements and equipment. EPA will notify and coordinate with the US Department of Homeland Security and provide an opportunity for them to participate, if appropriate.

-- Emergency response: EPA will continue to follow-up on its technical exchange with DOE and Israel on radiological contamination, with another meeting in Washington on November 12th. EPA will use this meeting to learn more about Israeli expertise on this issue. The Israelis are interested in following up on cooperation on area-wide contamination and recovery, and this too is an area of concern for EPA.

-- Exchange of Technical Information: EPA will work with its technical staff to provide information on key technical issues that the Israelis have requested, including:

- Verification of Innovative Environmental Technologies
- Health Impact Assessment
- Risk Management
- LADAR (Leak Detection & Repair)
- PRTR (Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers)
- Review of Methodology of Israeli Ambient Air Pollution Standards
- Environmental aspects of Israel's candidacy for OECD membership.

Cunningham